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SUBJECT: THE OFFICIAL, PUBLIC IRANIAN LINE IN TOKYO
REF: TOKYO 710

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)
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11. (C) SUMMARY: Iranian Ambassador to Tokyo Sayed Abbas Araghchi continues to take advantage of opportunities to publicly promote Iran's policies, speaking most recently on December 5 at a lecture sponsored by the Sasagawa Peace Foundation. Araghchi provided a brief introduction attempting to explain how the Iranian system attempts to combine both Islam and democracy into a model he calls "Islamic Modernism." He then gave a presentation entitled "Iran's Peaceful Nuclear Program" during which he recounted that it was the United States that recommended Iran develop a nuclear energy capability, how the Western powers reneged on their commitments to Iran's nuclear program following the revolution, how subsequently the same Western powers have taken advantage of Iran's willingness to suspend its nuclear operations during negotiations, and how the propaganda from the West paints Iran in a false light, even though it has complied with all its IAEA obligations. In short, Iran has learned the hard way, he said, that the West cannot be trusted. He asserted that Iran has no intention of developing nuclear weapons because it recognized that if it were to use one, it would invite certain destruction. END SUMMARY.

ISLAMIC MODERNISM

12. (SBU) Araghchi opened his remarks by explaining how the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is attempting to combine Islam and democracy. He called it a new type of political system where both would coexist despite the inherent conflict between the two: while democracy recognizes the supremacy of the will of the people, Islam is founded on the supremacy of God. How to balance the two has resulted in a conflict in Islam between those who call for a total rejection of democratic and western values and those who believe adaptation is possible. He said that to follow those who support the rejectionist mode, such as Al Qaida and the Taliban, would lead to isolation and confrontation. However, to permit unfettered adaptation will lead to secularization and westernization. The Iranian "Islamic Modernization" model seeks to bridge the gap. Accordingly, his government is attempting to promote both Islam and democracy while, at the same time, remaining independent.

IRAN'S PEACEFUL NUCLEAR PROGRAM

13. (SBU) The main portion of Araghchi's presentation focused on Iran's nuclear program and was similar to a presentation he made last March shortly after his arrival in Tokyo (ref.) He recounted how, in 1957, the United States had told the Shah that Iran should have a nuclear energy program and, as a result, Iran had entered into agreements with Germany, France and the United States to develop such a program. However,

when the Shah was removed by the Iranian revolution, the Western powers reneged on their contracts. This taught Iran a bitter lesson that the West cannot be trusted and that if Iran is to have its own nuclear energy it must control all aspects of it, including fuel production, in order to avoid being held at the mercy of others for political reasons. He acknowledged that Iran has huge oil and natural gas reserves, but asserted that it needs the proceeds from these resources to finance its own development. Accordingly, the fact that Iran is blessed with abundant energy resources does not mean that it shouldn't have a nuclear power industry.

14. (SBU) Araghchi continued that the West then launched a propaganda campaign against Iran, with some asserting that Iran was secretly developing nuclear weapons. In 2003, he said, the Germans, French and British wanted Tehran to negotiate, and asked Iran to suspend its nuclear activities in the interim. Iran agreed to suspend its activities as a confidence building measure, said Araghchi but the Western powers then began to drag their feet on the negotiations, as they had already achieved what they had sought - a suspension of Iran's nuclear program. In 2005, Iran had had enough of the stalling and announced it would recommence its program, in response to which the West offered a package of incentives which Araghchi termed "insulting." Iran subsequently reactivated its program having learned, said Araghchi a second hard lesson: that nothing can be achieved by negotiating with the West.

15. (SBU) Iran acknowledges and accepts the three Non-proliferation Treaty pillars for its nuclear program, claimed Araghchi: non-proliferation, disarmament, and the

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peaceful use of nuclear energy. He claimed that Iran has always complied with IAEA requirements, although he acknowledged that in some cases they may have been "late" in doing so. The IAEA, he asserted, has never issued a report stating that Iran's program has diverged into the military realm.

16. (SBU) With regard to next steps, Araghchi said that there are now two proposals on the table, Iran's and the one submitted by the P5 plus one. Neither side has rejected the proposal made by the other. He said that the commonalities of these two packages must now be negotiated without preconditions, and that creativity and good will must be shown by both sides. Araghchi said Iran can accept confidence building measures, but "do not ask us to give up our rights to nuclear energy."

17. (SBU) Araghchi asserted that complaints to the United Nations by others have not hindered Iran, which has in the meantime mastered fuel production technology, and that Iran will not stop until it has reached its goal, which is to produce 20,000 MW of nuclear energy annually by 2020. Concluding his prepared remarks, Araghchi underlined Iran's bottom line is self-sufficiency; it simply does not want to be dependent on anyone for its nuclear fuel. The Europeans, on the other hand, wish to maintain their monopoly in this field.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

18. (SBU) Following his presentation, Ambassador Araghchi took a number of questions from the floor. His responses are summarized below:

-- RELIGION AS A FACTOR: Araghchi was asked whether he thought the pressure being placed on Iran was the result of religious conflict. He answered that Tehran does not see the opposition by others to its nuclear program as a religious issue. "Both Islam and Christianity are tolerant religions; it is the extremists in both that create the problems. In

the West, it is those who control the media who create these problems by promoting an anti-Islam attitude."

-- DOUBLE STANDARD: Araghchi asserted in response to another question that a double standard is at play, pointing out the recent U.S.-India civil nuclear accord and the fact that the U.S. negotiates with North Korea "without any preconditions."

He said that Iran is a party to the NPT, unlike India, and is not, like North Korea, an isolationist country but rather a legitimate regional power that must get along with neighbors to assure the stability necessary to assure the flow of their oil to customers around the world. In addition, he said, Iran cooperated with the U.S. on Afghanistan and has negotiated with the U.S. on Iraq to promote security.

-- RUSSIA-BUSHEIR: Araghchi said that Iran's relations with Russia are good, and despite the fact that it has taken so long to complete Busheir, fuel for the plant has now been delivered and is being injected by Russian experts. The plant will be complete in 2009 and will begin producing electricity in autumn.

-- FINANCIAL CRISIS: Iran is not suffering from the effects of the global financial crises, asserted Araghchi "thanks to the sanctions against us."

-- NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION: Iran hopes that the inauguration of a new president in the United States will bring with it a change of approach, not only towards Iran, but towards the Middle East region as a whole. Araghchi asserted that the U.S. does not understand the region. He cited "intelligence failures" such as the failure to predict the Shah's fall, early support for Saddam against Iran, and the result of our entry into Iraq. "These U.S. failures lead to bad calculations which then lead to bad results," he said. "The U.S. needs to change its approach and policies." He pointed out that President Ahmedinejad had sent a congratulatory letter to President-elect Obama, "the first time in history such a letter has been sent," but is still waiting for a response.

-- ISRAEL: Asked whether Iran is in fact building nuclear weapons in order to deter Israel, Araghchi replied: "Iran is a peaceful country. We have never invaded another country. Our policy is peace in the region. We do not think that having a bomb deters Israel. Atom bombs belong to the Cold War era and are useless today. There is no place in our security calculations for nuclear weapons. We have the power and means to defeat aggressors already, so we don't need nuclear weapons. Suppose we were to get one bomb. What

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would we do with it? Attack Israel? That would be suicide. The United States would attack us with hundreds of bombs."

-- NUCLEAR WEAPONS ARE USELESS: Responding to one questioner who asked why no one is buying Iran's story, Araghchi asserted that Iran does not want and has no use for a nuclear weapon. Nuclear bombs are useless today, he said, noting that the United States could not prevent September 11 despite the fact it has nuclear weapons, and that Israel was defeated by Hizbollah, in spite of its nuclear arsenal. If Iran were to develop a nuclear weapons capability, it would lead to a destabilizing arms race in the region, which would not be in Iran's interest. Furthermore, nuclear weapons are against the teachings of Islam. And finally, Iran is a country that has had weapons of mass destruction deployed against it - Saddam used chemical weapons provided by the West - and so understands better than others how terrible they are.

COMMENT

(C) Ambassador Araghchi's presentation was smooth and

considerably non-confrontational. He dodged questions that seemed designed to elicit a hard-line response by simply ignoring those that required him to comment on Israeli motivations or actions. For example, when asked whether there is a religious component to Iran's dispute with the West he didn't mention Judaism. When asked whether the Israelis are pressuring the United States and the incoming Administration, he simply directed his answer elsewhere. Our Israeli contacts here told us they are concerned by Araghchi's active schedule, noting a "substantial" number of official visitors back and forth between Japan and Iran. A week before Araghchi's presentation, the Israel Ambassador called on the sponsors, ostensibly to discuss other things, and questioned them about why they were providing a forum to Iran. They were told that Ambassador Araghchi had requested the opportunity to make a presentation and they had accepted, believing in the need to keep open channels of communication and viewpoints.

SCHIEFFER